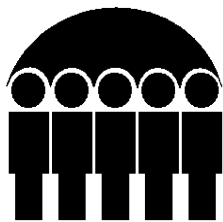


Revised October 23, 2001

Employees' Manual  
Title 20  
Chapter B

# OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



Iowa  
Department  
of  
Human Services

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## **OVERVIEW**

The Office of Communications is responsible for providing information to both the general public and other state agencies on activities of the Department of Human Services. The Office regularly works with all media in Iowa and other states, as well as with the executive and legislative branches of government. Additionally, the Office of Communications keeps Department employees in central office, field offices, and institutions up to date on Department activities.

## **MEDIA ALERTS**

**Legal reference:** Iowa Code Sections 21.2 and 21.4

Under Iowa's "open meetings" law, the Department must post notices and tentative agendas of meetings, as well as notify the local media at least 24 hours before the time of the meeting. If it is not possible to notify the public and the media within 24-hours of the meeting, the Department must:

- ◆ Give as much notice as is reasonably possible, and
- ◆ State the reason for less than a 24-hour notice in the minutes of the meeting.

"Meeting," for this purpose, means a gathering of a governmental body where there is deliberation or action upon any matter within the scope of the group's policy-making duties, whether in person or electronically, informal or formal. Meetings held via CIDS are not exempt from the public notice requirement.

"Governmental bodies" for the Department include:

- ◆ The Human Services Council
- ◆ The Mental Health and Mental Retardation Commission
- ◆ The HAWK-I Board
- ◆ The Developmental Disabilities Council
- ◆ Program area technical advisory committees
- ◆ General advisory committees
- ◆ Any other decision-making or policy-making committee (regardless of whether or not the committee is temporary or permanent) created by the Legislature, the Council, the Commission, or the Director

## **MEDIA ALERTS**

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Iowa Department of Human Services  
**Title 20** General Management  
**Chapter B** Office of Communications

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Central office employees should submit notices and agendas to the Office of Communications **ten days before the date of the meeting** whenever possible. Notice information must include time, date, and place of each meeting. The ten-day deadline allows communications staff time to write the media alert and mail to local media. Communications will post the notices and agenda in central office. Communications will also issue a media alert to the Des Moines media.

Region and institution personnel must post meeting notices and agendas in their local offices and their local media. The only time the Office of Communications should be notified of region and institution meetings is when subject matter to be discussed will affect Department policies.

For a copy of the *Iowa Open Meetings Law Handbook*, write the:

Iowa Freedom of Information Council  
118 Meredith Hall  
Drake University  
Des Moines, IA 50311

## **NEWS RELEASES**

The Department regularly releases information on programs, budget, and appointments to Iowa newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. Before information is released, it must be approved by the program person requesting the release, the bureau chief, the division administrator, the deputy directors, and the Department director. When information involves other agencies or the governor's office, approval must be obtained from these sources as well.

Submit information for a news release to the Office of Communications at least **three days before the desired publication date** to allow sufficient time for writing the release, receiving proper sign-offs, printing, and mailing.

Indicate the desired distribution. If you do not indicate specific towns for news release distribution, Communications will automatically issue the release statewide.

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**Legal reference:** Iowa Code Section 217.21

The Office of Communications is mandated to publish an annual report that includes budget and program information from the previous fiscal year.

All division administrators are asked to submit general statements on division goals and brief description of program activities during the fiscal year. The Division of Fiscal Management assists Communications in securing data for the annual report.

## **PHOTOGRAPH RELEASE**

**Legal reference:** Iowa Code Section 217.30

Because information about Department clients is confidential under Iowa law, you must secure a photograph release form must be from a client or guardian before a client is photographed for any Department publication, slide show, videotape, public service announcement or other project which could be viewed by the general public.

Forms 470-0060, *Authorization to Take and Use Photographs*, and 470-0064, *Authorization to Take and Use Photographs of Minor or Ward*, meet specifications outlined in an Attorney General's opinion issued June 14, 1979, and further instructions issued by that office in August, 1980. (See 20-B-Appendix for samples and instructions.)

All release forms must state the exact publication or manner in which the photos will be used.

A separate release must be secured each time a picture is used, as well as each time a publication is reprinted.

The Office of Communications must determine whether the client's circumstances have changed between the taking of the photograph and its publication, as well as between each publication or use of the photograph. If the client's status has changed, the photographs should not be used.

**MEDIA CONTACT**

Employees who are contacted by the press should make every effort to see that reporters are given accurate information from the most qualified Department source: If you are contacted by a reporter:

- ◆ Find out the general topic the reporter is interested in.
- ◆ answer the question to the best of your knowledge without violating a client's right to privacy.
- ◆ If you are not the most qualified person to answer the reporter's question, take the reporter's name and number.
- ◆ Notify the program person with the most expertise in the area and ask that person to return the reporter's call.
- ◆ If you feel your remarks will be contained in a "major breaking news story" with far reaching impact on the Department and clients, notify the Office of Communications and the director's office immediately.

This procedure applies to interviews where Department incidents or program issues are discussed. You need not report routine information released to the press, such as the number of clients receiving certain services.

**REPORTING CONTACTS TO DIRECTOR**

Notify the director's office of significant contacts with the press, legislators, the governor's office, or other significant people when these contacts are made under any of the following circumstances:

- ◆ When you are representing the Department in an official capacity or in the performance of delegated responsibilities.
- ◆ When, in your judgment, referral needs to be made to other people in the Department to obtain additional information or follow-up.
- ◆ When, in your judgment, information obtained from that contact would:
  - Aid administrators in the performance of their duties,
  - Lead to improved delivery of services,
  - Correct errors or deficiencies in the operations of the Department, or
  - Alert administrators to the responses of others to issues pertaining to human services.

| Contacts shall be reported in e-mail. This will:

- ◆ Ensure that the director's office is aware of:
  - Questions being asked or comments being made,
  - What the correct response is, and
  - What items are controversial.
- ◆ Enable the office to refer similar questions to the appropriate people.

The following exceptions are made to the general requirement of reporting significant contacts:

- ◆ When an elected official or the official's designee requests confidentiality regarding the contact.
- ◆ When the employee is not representing the Department in an official capacity or in the performance of delegated responsibilities and considers the contact to be a personal one.
- ◆ When the employee is lawfully engaged in partisan political activity as a private citizen.

Judgment is required in deciding which contacts are significant and when such contacts do not fall under the list of exceptions to the requirement. This policy is intended to assist the Department in being as responsive as possible to comments and questions. However, it should be interpreted in a manner designed to protect the rights of employees in regards to freedom of expression and personal privacy.



# STATE OF IOWA

THOMAS J. VILSACK, GOVERNOR  
SALLY J. PEDERSON, LT. GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
JESSIE K. RASMUSSEN, DIRECTOR

October 23, 2001

## GENERAL LETTER NO. 20-B-7

ISSUED BY: Director's Office

SUBJECT: Employees' Manual, Title 20, Chapter B, *OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS*,  
Title page, revised; Contents (page 1), revised; and pages 1 through 5, revised.

### Summary

This chapter is revised to reflect current policy, procedures, and style of format.

### Effective Date

Upon receipt.

### Material Superseded

Remove the following pages from Employees' Manual, Title 20, Chapter B, and destroy them:

<u>Page</u>	<u>Date</u>
Title page	July 15, 1980
Contents (page 1)	February 2, 1982
1-3	July 15, 1980
4, 4a, 4b, 5	February 2, 1982
6, 7	September 27, 1983

### Additional Information

Refer questions about this general letter to your regional benefit payment or service or collections administrator.